



Crafting Evidence-Based Questions

The Common Core State Standards for the English Language Arts represent a significant shift for educators—not only in how we choose text but also in how we talk about it with students and assess their interactions with it. The Standards steer us away from questions and prompts that require only a cursory read or have more to do with prior knowledge and personal experience than they do with the text. Instead, the Standards challenge us to create questions and prompts that call for a deep reading—and often, a rereading or revisiting—of the text.

If you're working to build Common Core-aligned lessons and assessments around literature or nonfiction text, keep in mind these general do's and don'ts:

Do:

- Ask students to make inferences.
- Ask students to cite evidence from the text to support a response.
- Ask about the central idea and key details of a text.
- Ask students to use context clues to understand vocabulary that is specific to the topic (for example, the word “emancipation” in a historical novel about the Civil War).
- Ask about craft in addition to content (For example: Why does the author include a particular passage or piece of information? Why is the text organized in a given way? Why is a certain metaphor used?).
- Ask students to compare and contrast multiple works (including digital or multimedia sources) on the same topic or theme.

Don't:

- Focus excessively on how the text might relate to students' own experiences.
- Ask students to recall obvious or unimportant details.
- Load students with so much information about a text topic that they hardly need to read the text (for example, by describing the themes of a novel in detail before they read).

You might try questions like the following:

- How does the main character change during the story? What events in the story contribute to the change?
- How do Character A and Character B see the problem differently? Cite evidence from the text that supports your answer.
- What is the central idea that the author intended to convey? How do you know?
- How does the diagram (or illustration, map, chart, or photo) on page X contribute to your understanding of the topic?
- Describe the way the text is organized. Why do you think the author organized it that way?
- Compare Book A with Book B on a similar topic. In what ways are the two texts alike? In what ways are they different?
- To what genre does this text belong? Offer evidence from the text to support your response.